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ABSTRACT

Attention to different aspects of communicative competence (form and meaning) in second language instruction creates different kinds of learning environments. Form-focused classrooms favor transmission of linguistic competence. Whole-class instruction and lockstep conditions restrict communication. Input from teacher language and attitudes toward errors may be problematic. Practice opportunities are often mechanistic and concentrate on disparate skills. Meaning-focused classrooms pay attention to all aspects of communicative competence. The syllabus is flexible and, to an extent, built on learner needs. Characteristic features are: culture-bound, content-based target language work in groups, skills integration, flexible materials, and rich opportunity for input and practice. Learning strategies are consciously developed by emphasizing learner responsibility and by teaching and practicing strategies for communication and studying. Out-of-school contacts such as visits to technical facilities, project-oriented visits to foreign schools, camp schools, and cultural exchanges add value to content-based learning environments. Multiethnic communities can either restrict or support first- and second-language learning, as can school experiences. Form-focused classrooms have been studied sufficiently. Although there is information on various aspects of meaning-focused classrooms, it is scattered. Contains 68 references. (MSE)

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THE ROLE OF ENVIRONMENT IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

THE ROLE OF ENVIRONMENT IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

Attention to different aspects of communicative competence creates different kinds of learning environments. They focus on form, or on meaning. Form-focussed classrooms favour transmission of linguistic competence. Whole-class instruction and lockstep conditions restrict communication. Input from the teacher's language, and attitudes to errors may be problematic. Practice opportunities are often mechanistic and concentrate on separate skills.

Meaning-focussed classrooms pay attention to all aspects of communicative competence. The syllabus is flexible and built to an extent on learner needs. Characteristic features are: culture-bound, content-based target language work in groups, integration of skills, flexible materials, and rich opportunity for input and practice. Learning to learn is consciously developed by emphasizing learner responsibility, and by teaching and practising strategies for communication and studying.

In out-of-school contacts, technical facilities, project-based school visits, camp schools and visits with focus on cultural immersion add a promising dimension to content-based learning environments. Multi-ethnic communities may support or restrict learning of L1 and L2. School can influence the development.

Form-focussed classrooms are sufficiently studied. There is plenty of scattered information on meaning-focussed classrooms, like interviews (discourse analysis), questionnaires (content analysis), observations and analysed descriptions from mainly ethnographic research programmes. They are studies on syllabus, procedures, materials, teacher and learner roles, communication and strategies. There is scattered information on out-of-school contacts and on the role of multi-ethnic communities for language studies in Europe.

Irma Huttunen

THE ROLE OF ENVIRONMENT IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

I. DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

1.1. The concept of learning environment

Learning takes place in interaction between learner and environment. In the interaction process, the learner selects which features in the environment to pay attention to. The selection process can be influenced to an extent through conscious direction of attention, which take different forms in different kinds of environments (Huttunen, forthcoming). New information can be comprehended by means of inferencing, i.e. by comparing it with the acquired knowledge and clues from the context in which it occurs (Weinstein & Mayer 1986). The two essential ways of doing this comparison and of building up one's knowledge and gaining deeper insight are through reflection and through active trying out (Kolb 1984). Different learning environments offer different kinds of opportunities for this process.

In this paper, the concept of learning environment refers to the physical, mental and social conditions at the learners' disposal. Two levels of learning environment are paid attention to: 1) At the classroom level: a) The physical conditions refer to learning in school context with implications like resources available. b) The mental level refers to the approach assumed, with implications like focus of attention, nature of interaction and practice opportunities. c) The social level refers to student and teacher roles. 2) At the level of community: 1) The physical conditions refer to out-of-school contacts and contacts with other schools. 2) The mental level refers to attitudes to language studies, target language (TL) and its culture. 3) The social level refers to the language and culture of the surrounding society, which determines whether the TL is the student's first language (L1), a language that is new to him/her but spoken in the community (L2), or whether the TL is new and not spoken in the community (foreign language, FL). The focus in this report is on FL.

1.2. The concept of communicative competence

The opportunities learning environments offer for language studies is dependent on the aspects of competence they encourage, both as such and through the working modes adopted. The three leading models of communicative competence have been presented by Canale & Swain (1980), Bachman (1990), and van Ek (1986). In his comparison of the three models, North (1994) shows that there is considerable overlap between them. In van Ek's and Bachman's models, the categories of communicative competence are the following:

van Ek:	Bachman:
Linguistic Competence 1. Language functions. 2. General notions 3. Specific notions 4. Grammar & meaningful intonation patterns 5. Vocabulary and idiom	A. Language Knowledge - Illocutionary comp. - Grammatical comp. (Lexis, morphology, syntax)
6. Sociolinguistic Competence	- Sociolinguistic comp.

7. Discourse Competence	- Textual comp.
8. Compensatory Competence	B. Strategic comp (assessment, planning, execution)
9. Socio-cultural Competence	
	C. Psycho physiological Mechanisms (Mode: receptive, productive; Channel: oral, aural, visual)

1.3. The concept of learning to learn

The concept of learning to learn refers to insightful learning in general, and aims at the development of learner autonomy. This implies the learners' willingness and ability to take responsibility for their own learning (Trim 1988; Holec 1988), i.e. to utilize their learning environment, and possibly affect changes, if necessary. As learning is an interaction process, social context is an important aspect in it. The two key issues emerging from the objectives of learning to learn are development of awareness and strategic competence, which help regulation of learning. This takes place through metacognitive strategies and metalanguage.

As raising of awareness is the starting point of learning, strategic competence represents the dynamic element of acquiring and using knowledge. The concept can refer to the issue of how the target language itself is dealt with. Referring to Faerc & Kasper (1983), Bachman looks at planning, execution and assessment as part of communicative competence. They then serve, as North (1994) proposes, as "a hinge between the competence side and the activities to meet real world challenges".

Strategic competence can also refer to ways of carrying out language studies. We then speak about learner strategies. Learner strategies are tools for learning which learners employ (Little 1994). Different learning environments can call for different strategies, but use of strategies is also dependent on individual learning styles and maturity of learner. Different learner strategy areas are defined by O'Malley & Chamot (1990) as follows:

- Metacognition refers to knowledge about cognition (i.e. occupying thoughts about cognitive operations) and regulation about cognition (e.g. planning, monitoring and evaluation).
- Cognitive strategies are more directly related to individual learning tasks and entail direct manipulation or transformation of learning materials.
- Social and affective strategies represent a broad grouping that involves either interaction with another person or ideational control over affect.

II. STUDYING IN DIFFERENT KINDS OF LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

The way the teacher sees the issues of communicative competence and learning to learn determines how much attention is paid to form, meaning and function, and what the content of studies and the interaction in the classroom will be like. It is reflected in input and practice opportunities. Input opportunities are opportunities to encounter what one is trying to learn. The basic types of input are "bits of the language" available to the learners, especially when the lesson is conducted in the target language, and "bits of information" that any attentive learner could get about the language. Practice

opportunities are opportunities to practise with the bits of language one is trying to learn, or to practise language learning techniques (Allwright & Bailey 1991).

2.1. Learning environments at classroom level

Language studies can have a basically linguistic approach with focus on form, or a communicative approach with focus on meaning.

2.1.1. Form-focussed learning environments

Ellis (1990) notices that behaviourist psychology continues to influence many teachers' thinking of how language is learnt. The approach is linguistic. The quality of the conditions of practice, however, constitutes the principal difference between a cognitive and behaviouristic view of language learning, which represents a transmission model.

Sixty-one Swedish FL teachers and over a hundred students were interviewed by Eriksson (1993) about their own FL learning experiences. The lessons were described as "traditional", which in their context meant reading a text aloud, translating it, underlining structures and phrases which were to be learnt by heart. Grammar was practised through translation of sentences and texts, both to L1 and TL. The patterns described by the two groups seemed to be frequently similar, except that in the 80s there was less translation and more work in dyads. The situation is probably somewhat similar in many countries.

As seen from the above example, form-focussed language learning environments pay little attention to meaning and function. Thus only a restricted part of communicative competence is dealt with: the main emphasis lies on linguistic competence and written discourse competence. The area of socio-linguistic competence may get some attention, while the rest of the competence areas are ignored.

This will characterize interaction in the classroom. Because of the nature of the learning content, the teachers usually manage the interaction in form-focussed classrooms as if they were in sole charge. This means that there is plenty of whole-class instruction, which is problematic from the point of view of learner participation. This means, as Allwright & Bailey (1991) note, that engagement with the language learning task at hand may be largely an internal, mental phenomenon, which may or may not be active. Think-aloud protocols and elicited self-report data collected during actual classroom lessons show that 50 % of students attend to the content of the lesson, and that most just repeat the material to themselves (Cohen 1990). This would mean that half of the students take responsibility of their learning and only few of them actually know how to learn: they have adopted simple and mechanistic strategies to deal with the input.

Input from teacher's speech

In strongly form-focussed classrooms, teachers take practically all the responsibility for input and practice opportunities. Gremmo, Holec & Riley (1978) give an example of how this takes place: the teachers have the right to participate in all exchanges, and initiate them. They can decide on the length of an exchange, and close it. They can include and exclude other participants in exchanges, and open all adjacency pairs. They can be the only possible addressees of any exchange initiated by another participant. They can decide on the order of other participants' turns, and decide on the number of turns to be attributed to each participant.

Apart from restricting interaction, this has a direct effect on the use of TL for instructional tasks. If a teacher has a tendency to use his/her dominant language for instructional tasks, the result will be a similar tendency in the learners' preferences for language use (Chaudron 1988). This information from bilingual classes is certainly true of form-focussed FL classes, in which there is an even stronger tendency to use L1 for explanation of structure and vocabulary. In Eriksson's study (1993), 32 % of the work of 61 teachers was still teacher-centred one year after an 18-month-long inservice course. 45 teachers and 53 students reported, however, that with a shift to more group work and communicative tasks, they had started to use more TL. Some teachers, however, gave up this "impossible" effort. Zalbide (1994) reports that teaching of Basque children mainly in Spanish brought about fairly modest results.

The teacher's language is of importance as input to learners. This input has easily special features, at least in strongly form-focussed teaching, in which lockstep conditions usually prevail. Long & al. (1976) define lockstep lessons as segments of classroom interaction in which the teacher and all the learners interact in a way that compels the learners to mentally 'march in step' at the same tempo and deal with the same topic. In lockstep situations, texts are easily seen solely as sources of vocabulary, to be treated as objects of learning, and highlighted and elaborated through questions and remarks by the teacher. He/she tends to use significantly more imperatives, more statements and comprehension checks but fewer clarification requests than native teachers do in discussion-like conditions (Long & Sato 1983). Such interaction serves as an input and practice opportunity for a certain kind of situations, but does not resemble what the learners encounter outside the classroom.

In form-focussed classrooms, some teachers use TL for structuring purposes pro forma: the learners get an immediate translation to make sure that the students understand (Wong-Willmore 1989). Thus they are deprived the opportunity of forming and testing hypotheses and developing their strategies. Krashen (1982) notes that learning is promoted by use of TL which is slightly more advanced than the learner's current level of comfortable understanding. Many teachers obviously aim at this by tailoring their speech to match the general, or even the lowest, proficiency level of the students (Chaudron 1988). This again means that the teacher's language seldom offers challenging input for the rest of the class.

A further issue in interaction is the teachers' questioning behaviour, which gets easily more emphasis in form-focussed classrooms than in a meaning-focussed classroom. In Chaudron's summary (1988) teachers' questions represent 20-40% of major syntactic types. The main problem is the nature of the questions asked by teachers. In form-focussed environments they tend to ask questions which expect closed, and usually short responses, and seldom questions which leave the nature of the expected answer open. They also tend to ask more 'display' questions, i.e. questions pro forma, than 'referential' questions, to which the teacher does not know the answer (Long & Sato 1983; Chaudron 1988). A large amount of closed display-type questions do not serve as fruitful input for language acquisition because of the mechanistic nature of discussion they imply.

Opportunities for practice in TL

Typically, practice consists of tasks in separate skills, and is often teacher-guided whole-class activity. This is a lock-step situation, in which weak learners tend to suffer through lack of repeated access to knowledge (Lutjeharms 1991), while the exercises may be loss of time for more advanced learners. The situation does not necessarily change if the work is done in the same fashion in dyads and small groups. Paper and pen exercises on the form of TL are favoured in the approach. Discussion of the content of the text often takes place through 'display' questions in exercise books, which may be answered orally or in writing.

Audio tapes are approached as models for pronunciation, for drilling purposes, or for multiple choice comprehension tasks. Videos are mainly used as fillers. In so-called oral discussion exercises, the main phraseology for different situations is practised in short discussions, during which the model in the book is mechanically repeated. With young learners, this practice may take the form of a role play, for which the students often learn the text by heart. There seems to be seldom time for group discussions which focus on genuine meaning and allow interaction that approaches real-life communication.

The focus also directs attitudes to errors in such environments. The concept of interlanguage has no effect on every-day life there, though distinction between errors (patterns that consistently differ from the target language model) and mistakes (memory lapses) is probably recognized. Allwright & Bailey (1991) note that in formal classroom instruction, the teacher's response to students' utterances may be the most important criterion for judging error. This is unfortunate, as learners' responses are sometimes rejected because they are unexpected, not because they are wrong. So learners are reported to respond to questions in the way the teacher had planned. No variation is allowed (Fanselow 1977). This leads to the kind of situation reported by Bergström (1987), who found no correlation between the learners' communicative ability and their written and oral performance in tests. No doubt, such practice moulds the interaction in the classroom and has a strong effect on learning of language, of communication, and of strategies. The message to the learners is that there is only one correct way of saying a thing and that there is only one correct way of building up communication. Testing that is built on the same principles serves to strengthen this view among learners.

Long (1983) argues that the advantage of instruction over natural exposure might lie in part in focus on form. Though important, noticing and attending to linguistic facts does not, however, guarantee their acquisition: learners may not have enough background knowledge to understand the facts, or they may not have strategic tools to deal with the information offered (cf. e.g. Lutjeharms 1991).

The atmosphere of a form-focussed environment has certainly strong effect on the quality of learners' motivation. The learners' attention is directed to form, not explicitly to the culture(s) behind the TL, neither on the learners' own learning processes. If, however, the offered learning contents are not meaningful to the learners, they may loose motivation. If the learners do not manage to find insight in their learning, their view of themselves as learners may be blurred or become negative (Laine & Pihko 1991).

2.1.2. Meaning-focussed learning environments

Theoretically, meaning-focussed learning environments pay attention to all the aspects of communicative competence. Teachers see the practical applications, however, in widely different ways (Individual reports for Workshops 2 and 13). Though focussing on meanings, purely naturalistic communication is left outside this discussion, as there is no instruction as part of the learning process.

There is not much research available on the linguistic effect of meaning-focussed communication in FL/L2 classrooms, apart from the Canadian immersion studies (e.g. Lightbown 1987), which are in general in favour of the approach. Schmidt (1983) concludes that ability in effective communication can be attained in naturalistic conditions but that such ability is not necessarily accompanied with high linguistic accuracy. Shachar & Sharan (1994) report a distinct change in verbal interaction patterns in collaborative classes. In Huttunen's (1986) project, the pupils of three meaning-focussed

classes got higher marks in their FL essays in a national matriculation examination than could be expected by the overall level of their linguistic performance in the exam.

Chaudron (1988) discusses some research on learner production, initiation and interaction, and comes to the conclusion that the rather weak findings in general for the influence of learner behaviour on learning outcomes do not indicate the true relationships but rather reflect inadequate research on the topic. It may also be that such rich environments are not easily amenable to causal conclusions. The main bulk of research conducted on communicative language learning and learning to learn has been to develop the aspect(s) concerned. It is usually ethnographic classroom research (e.g. Workshops 2 and 13).

The aim of communicative classroom environments is to supply learners with meaningful and comprehensible input and practice opportunities. The focus is on the whole range of communicative competence. There is an effort to make language, culture and learning itself meaningful to the learners through both abstract discussion and concrete experience. For this objective, the development of communicative ability is related to the needs of the learners. They have immediate and potential communicative needs for the expression of their own meanings in the classroom and outside the classroom (Sheils 1988). For this purpose, questionnaires, planning sheets, and evaluation-based, materials-based, and aims-based planning procedures have been developed (e.g. Huttunen 1991; Workshops 2 and 13; Holec 1988).

According to Sheils (1988), a communicative language teacher is: a manager of classroom activities and a facilitator of learning; a co-participant in the learning process; a motivator/stimulator and an adviser/an expert; a resource and a provider of feedback on learners' attempts at communication; a competent speaker of the target language; a good listener and an observer/monitor; a researcher, and, on the whole, a patient person (Cf. also Huttunen 1993). Compared with form-focussed classrooms, this list implies a very different view of learning environment. There is no suggestion of teacher-directed lock-step approach. Neither does the teacher take the sole responsibility of what happens in the classroom; it is also partially the students' responsibility.

The syllabus of meaning-focussed classrooms may be built in different ways to serve the overall objectives planned by the teacher or a teacher group. Here are some examples presented:
- Sheils, Clancy & O'Laoire (1993) presented an overall plan to develop meaningful learning within a communicative context. It catered for the whole year and aimed at teaching the lower secondary school students how to 1) select learning objectives, 2) choose materials/resources compatible with these objectives, 3) decide and negotiate on work/activities, 4) evaluate progress and the learning process itself.
- Mc.Ghie & Cantley (1993) presented a unit-based "Menu" system for a mixed-ability class in comprehensive school. 1) Each unit began with a discussion of the aims of the unit. 2) Specific functions were taught and reinforced as a whole-class activity. 3) The "Menu" was presented. There were some whole-class activities and suggestions for differentiated activities at two optional levels. Each individual was progressing at his/her own pace in different kinds of groupings. 4) Teacher support and plenty of learning materials and equipment was freely available for the learners, who were expected to be able to take responsibility for their own learning from quite an early stage.
- Dam & Gabrielsen (1988) present a highly flexible system, in which the programme was designed step by step: 1) The learners and teachers discussed to determine the purpose of the next phase of their work. 2) The learners chose, or possibly brought the supporting materials and made decisions on their use. 3) The plans were discussed with the teacher. 4) The teacher observed and analysed the process. 5) At the end of the phase the learners evaluated the process with the teacher. 6) On the basis of the evaluation, they assigned their personal objectives for the next phase.

- Huttunen (1988) reported of a flexible 6-week modular system. It allowed studies in different compositions, depending on the plans which the teacher and learners made at the beginning of each module. There was a scheme with three different levels of autonomy for planning and evaluation purposes. An overall view of the process was as follows: 1)The learners decided on group objectives and personal objectives, and how to carry them out. 2) They monitored their own study procedures, e.g. chose or acquired materials, and took personal and social responsibility of their studies, supported by the teacher when necessary. 3) They also evaluated process and product.

What is common to all these examples is that they do not offer just one method or option, but they all allow different solutions according to situation, theme and learner needs. They form a framework for rich input, reflection, and practice opportunities.

Input from teacher's speech

Thirty-three Finnish upper secondary school teachers of five foreign languages in ten schools answered a questionnaire after a three-year experiment on communicative language teaching. According to their own estimation, their use of TL in the classroom varied between 70-99%. L1 was used for discussing grammatical structures, the students' test performance, and for giving advice. (Huttunen & al. 1995). Shachar & Sharan (1994) report a distinctive change in verbal interaction patterns in collaborative learning classes. They found that disciplinary remarks by teachers made up 14% of teacher-pupil interactions, compared with 22% in traditional classes. Teachers' lectures and short questions occupied 11% of verbal actions, while the corresponding figure in traditional classes was 68%. Peer interactions accounted for the bulk of the communication in the classroom.

This supports the general knowledge that the input provided by the teacher differs both linguistically and contentwise from that in form-focussed classrooms. Interaction in communicative classes is richer in variation. Especially speaking with small groups and individuals changes the nature of interaction. The variation of topics from content to linguistic and learning-to-learn issues has its effects on both teacher and learner language as well. As the environment implies plenty of cooperation, and individual and group tutoring, one could suppose that there is less questioning, and accordingly fewer closed 'display' questions, than in form-focussed classrooms, and correspondingly more real communication with genuine 'referential' questions for open-ended answers. This would mean that there should be plenty of meaningful input available at different levels of complexity.

Though it is difficult to say in detail how the teachers' attitudes to errors are different in meaning-focussed classes, an example may serve to give a general view. During the process of shifting over to a communicative approach, the teachers of an experiment described their error correction behaviour and attitudes to errors and mistakes in the following way: In the beginning many were anxious about not being able to hear every student's speech and correct their mistakes. Very soon they grew to understand that practice would entail more experience, fewer errors, and improved language and communication on the whole.

There were four types of error correction: 1) After a discussion of some topic in groups or dyads, volunteers were invited to present their discussion to the whole class. The whole discussion, including the language, was commented upon. 2) The teacher circulated in the classroom, listening to the discussions in the groups, picked language that would hinder communication, and, when suitable, gave the whole class some hints on how to express certain things more fluently. 3) The teacher concentrated on the speech of a couple of students in turn, and gave them individual feedback. This was seen as one way to deal with the pupils' need for assessment (cf. Girard & al. 1988). 4) The students audio taped or video taped some of their discussions, either during a lesson or at home, and

reviewed and evaluated them during groupwork sessions. There was often also peer evaluation, and the teacher took part in the discussions (Huttunen & al. 1995).

Opportunities to practise with language

The practice opportunities in meaning-focussed classrooms differed considerably in at least five aspects from those in form-focussed environments:
1) The effect of the overall approach was that the learners were surrounded with a rich TL environment, which also expected constant active use of TL, not only in specific practice situations but in interaction with both teacher and peers, and in search and reporting of information (Reports for Workshop 13).
2) The emphasis was on work in groups and dyads, which naturally implied more opportunities to actively use the language (Workshop 13; Nunan 1992).
3) Work in the groups was largely content-based, which offered different kinds of language at different levels of complexity to work with. Many teachers rejected the use of mechanistic exercises on structures; if such exercises were needed, they were done at home and checked by the students with keys (Huttunen & al. 1995; Workshops 2 and 13).
4) There were no separate exercises of the four 'skills', but integrated work on agreed themes and topics (ibid.).
5) Extensive reading and listening became an important part of search for meaningful information and language for communication. In stead of being just an exercise, writing and speaking became a way to express one's knowledge and views (ibid.; Coste 1993).

Preparation for at least larger-scale communicative entities is considered necessary (Sheils 1988). In the reported experiments, the teachers had several ways to prepare their students to meet with the linguistic and strategic requirements of their studies. Some teachers taught their students negotiation of meanings, the basic language for communication in different situations, and strategies for dealing with written and spoken text, with the idea that they would resort to that knowledge whenever necessary. Some other teachers prepared their students for each project. In such preparation, some teachers resorted first to a "mechanistic" preparation phase, where all the basic skills and basic language required were checked before the actual project phase, in which the students worked in groups and took the main responsibility for their work. A third approach was to proceed stepwise in preparation, so that different bits of language were practised carefully before the actual "big theme" was taken up for students to work on (Workshops 2 and 13; Huttunen & al. 1995).

Communicative classes encourage interaction between teacher and student, and also between peers, as an important part of the process. It is therefore important for learners to use TL. In the Huttunen & al. report, one teacher estimated that ca. 50% of her students' speech during lessons was in TL, while some other teachers complained a shift to L1 if the students did not know a word in TL. Most of the teachers, however, were content with their students' use of TL and improvement in it. This view was indirectly supported by their good results in a national oral communication test. Ihamäki & Ihamäki (1994) report an interview with seventeen 10-year-old Finnish students, who had studied English as FL for 16 months, two 45-minute lessons a week. These students were able to take part in a 30-minute conversation in English and express, at least somehow, their meanings to the interviewer. This would not have been possible without extensive use of TL during the lessons, which was confirmed through observations.

The materials for meaning-focussed studies are expected to be meaningful and challenging to the learners, to extend their experiences and range of concepts, and to provide good models for natural language use. In addition, they are expected to offer variation, opportunities for choice, for cooperation instead of competition, and for possibilities to resort to different kinds of learner

strategies (Sheils 1988). Reading materials, audio and video tapes, and telematics were used for both practice of language and for communication. Also opportunities for more direct out-of-school contacts, e.g. TL visitors to the class and interviews of TL speakers, school visits at home and abroad, and other larger-scale out-of-school contacts were favoured as ways to get meaningful input and practice opportunities (Workshops 2 and 13).

Focus on meaning in language studies implies knowledge and awareness of the own and the foreign. Thus one aspect of the content of studies is kowledge and awareness of, and attitudes to, TL culture, which can be described with the concept of socio-cultural competence (Byram & Zarate 1994; Neuner 1994). Such competence is important for both understanding the culture from which a language springs and for being able to communicate with representatives of TL culture(s). The concept was approached from anthropological and socio-linguistic points of view in the experiments for Workshop 13. The issue of culture was a penetrating aspect in most of the reported developments (Palamidesi Cesaretti 1995).

Learning to learn in meaning-focussed classrooms

The issue of learning to learn adds a new aspect to meaning-focussed learning environments by emphasizing the role of awareness of the learning process itself. Just as language proficiency emerges from analysis of linguistic knowledge and control of language processing (Bialystock 1991), meaningful study process emerges from understanding of what one is doing, why and how, and with what success. Such awareness also gives tools to improve one's learning through development of one's strategic knowledge and skills. Van Ek & Trim (1991) emphasize the fact that they should not be a separate objective but an integral part of the study process. In language learning environments, there are two sets of strategies that should be paid attention to: strategies for interlanguage communication, and strategies that are more directly connected with the study process itself.

In interlanguage communication, learners often need to resort to various strategies to be able to take part in conversations. Faerch and Kasper (1983) present an analysis of the most common communication strategies. Learners clearly profit from strategy instruction (Workshops 2 and 13; Ihamäki & Ihamäki 1995). Also Bialystock & Frölich (1978) suggest that classroom activities should be matched with the learners' developmental tendencies. According to Chesterfield & Chesterfield (1985), receptive strategies were the first to develop. Strategies which permit learners to initiate and maintain interaction came next. Strategies demonstrating awareness and monitoring of grammar errors were the last to develop among the first-year students.

The term strategic competence refers to the learning process itself (North 1994; Holec 1988; Little 1994). O'Malley & Chamot (1990) found that the influencing factors in students' strategy choices were:

1) Objectives of a particular language course;
2) Degree of language learning expertise;
3) The nature of tasks, which was the critical factor;
4) Students' motivation for learning and studying TL, which emerged as a primary influence.

It is the teacher who sets up the learning environment by choosing the main objectives of studies, by giving the instruction, and by suggesting learning tasks and materials to fit the objectives. An example of the effect of teaching is given in O'Malley & Chamot's report, where rehearsing and summarizing strategies were used in a test by only one group of learners.

O'Malley & Chamot (1990) present the results of a series of five extensive research projects. The strategies that appeared in at least two of their projects were as follows:

1) Metacognitive strategies: planning, directed attention, selective attention, self management, self monitoring, and self evaluation.
2) Cognitive strategies: repetition, grouping, elaboration, transfer, inferencing, note taking, summarising, substitution, resourcing and translation.
3) Social and affective strategies: questions for clarification, cooperation, and self-talk.
This gives a general overview of the field. There is, however, little research on strategies of FL learners at different developmental phases in the special areas of reading, writing, listening and conversation in groups.

Many strategies seem to be teachable (Holec 1994). There are different opinions on how the teaching should take place, and how the teacher should approach the issue. There are two main options: 1) separate vs. integrated instruction, and 2) direct vs. embedded instruction (Oxford 1990; O'Malley & Chamot 1990; Holec 1994; Dickinson 1987). The role of communication strategies in assessment needs also clarification.

III. INFLUENCE OF DIFFERENT KINDS OF OUT-OF-SCHOOL CONTACTS

Out-of-school contacts serve to bring school closer to society. Apart from the most conventional ways to bring the world into the classrooms, exchange of letters, cassettes, and other kinds of materials with foreign classes, contacts via technical facilities, and school visits are increasing (e.g. Workshop 13). Huttunen & Kukkonen (1995) found that correspondence correlated with achievement among young learners.

3.1. Contacts via technical facilities

Fairly new possibilities for language learners are: distance teaching in the form of joint lessons with learners from other schools, even in other countries; computer-mediated studies, including interactive multimedia, CD-ROMs, and access to hypertext -based information (e.g. Kornum 1994; Davies & Samways). They enable joining the electronic 'Global Village' or a life-long 'Virtual School', which spontaneously mixes with the surrounding society (Blystone 1989). Opportunities for rich culture-bound input, practice of oral and written meaningful communication, and the aspect of learning to learn are considerable.

Access to data bases allows new types of studies, which develop both linguistic and learning-to-learn skills. E-mail has become an integral part of FL teaching in the classes where it has been experimented. Individual and large-group communication, and work on the messages in dyads and small groups provide meaningful and challenging input and practice opportunities (Kornum 1994; Tella 1992).

3.2. School visits

The popularity of school visits has grown in many countries in recent years. In Norway, this is an urban trend, and a considerable number of classes visit foreign schools every year. In Denmark, there is less such activity. In Finland an estimated fourth of the schools have contacts abroad, and many classes also pay visits abroad on funding from different sources (Report 1994). The Lingua Programme supports school visits, but many schools do not allow absence from school for the required 14 days.

Earlier on, school visits tended to be more like tourist visits. The trend in Finland and Norway is now to organise the visits on project basis. In Norway, whole classes go abroad to do small 'research' projects on e.g. the pollution problem in the River Rhein. According to Report (1994), most Finnish international student and teacher exchanges and visits take place within twin-school scemes, so-called 'camp school' arrangements, Unesco school activity, and within special programmes like e.g. Healthy Schools in Europe Project, Culture and Heritage Classes in Europe Project, and The Baltic Sea Project. They are small-scale immersion 'research' studies on an agreed topic, which are reported and discussed with partner classes during school visits. The 'camp schools' offer guided visits to target culture with studies in all the school subjects in TL. School visits and other opportunities to meet young people are also arranged. The students write diaries in TL, and a TL report is expected of them after the visit (Report 1995).

A third type of arrangement is immersion into TL culture through living in TL families and studying in school for a week or two. A preparation period included choice of a role from the target culture to identify with. Practice of socially acceptable language, and exchange of letters with the receiving families were part of it. The visit was regarded as a practical application of the preparation studies. The students were expected to pay special attention to the life of the kind of persons they wanted to identify with. Detailed notes for later discussion on the observed linguistic and cultural features were taken (Kaikkonen1995).

The three types of school visits offer somewhat different learning environments. What is common in them is focus on meaning, rich input in meaningful language and culture, and practice in communication. The teachers report high motivation and linguistic development among the students. There is, however, no possibilities to measure causal effects of such studies.

IV. TWO CASES OF LANGUAGE LEARNING IN A MULTI-ETHNIC COMMUNITY

The amount and nature of support by the surrounding community to studies in L1 and L2 varies considerably. The often meagre opportunities of FL learners cannot be compared with the possibilities of L2 learners to get comprehensible linguistic and cultural input and practice opportunities outside the school. On the other hand, the strong influence of the surrounding community may hamper the acquisition of L1 to a considerable extent. The two cases quoted here imply the importance of the way in which the students' learning environments are arranged in school in such circumstances.

The first case deals with studies of Sami in Lapland, where a language switch is taking place. Svonni (1993) and Hyltenstam (1992; Hyltenstam & Svonni 1990) have studied the linguistic competence of Sami children. Svonni reports conversation tests for 36 children aged 11-13, who spoke a variant of the Sami language and came from seven schools in Swedish Lapland. The L1 of the students was Sami or Swedish, or they were bilinguals.

On the basis of the tests and interviews of children, parents and teachers, Svonni concludes that intensive use of L1 in home and community are prerequisites for good communicative competence. Learning of Sami as L2 should start as early as possible, and use of the language in out-of-school conditions should be fostered. In school, the focus of language studies should be on meaning and communication. Immersion studies should be encouraged for development of concepts in Sami. Zalbide (1994) makes similar conclusions about teaching of Basque.

The second case deals with the effects of school studies on the communicative competence of Finnish children living in a multi-ethnic community in Sweden. Kuure (1994) interviewed some

Swedish and Finnish teachers, who teach students of 7 to 15 in Finnish classes in two Swedish schools. Some of the children have lived all their lives in Sweden, some have come there later. Both schools aim at bilingualism through immersion. The theoretical studies are first carried out in L1, and all the other studies in L2. Gradually the amount of L2 in theoretical studies increases and reaches roughly half of the study time in class 6. In classes 7-9 the systems differ in the schools. The teachers are native Swedes and bilingual native Finns.

According to the teachers, the competence of their students in both Finnish and Swedish improves considerably during the last three classes. A Swedish variant of Finnish becomes the dominating language. The students' ability to communicate in writing compares with that of Finnish children of the same age. By the end of the sixth year, their oral ability of Swedish is fluent and practically free from accent, and by the end of their ninth year, their ability to write is almost comparable to that of Swedish L1 students.

According to the interviewed teachers, these students' knowledge of Swedish seems to exceed that of Finnish students in Swedish classes, who tend to be quieter and afraid to communicate in fear of mistakes. Some seem to loose Finnish identity by the age of 15, whereas the style of communication among the students in the bilingual classes is based on their own identity and cultural background. The language in the classes switches constantly, meanings are checked, and the students play with L2 and joke about their own mistakes. There seems to be a supporting interplay between school and the multilingual community.

These cases imply a strong influence of multi-ethnic communities on the development of children's communicative competence. They also show the importance of the quality of the classroom learning environments for language learning.

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THE ROLE OF ENVIRONMENT IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

Proposal of topics for discussion:

1. Would it be sensible and feasible to put up a systematic research project on different areas of communicative language learning?

2. If so, what would the areas be?

3. What kind of research and methodologies should be resorted to?

4. Would a common broad framework theory be necessary to be able to discuss the results?

5. If so, what theories should be considered?

6. Where could the results be published? Scattered/concentrated?